

Hometown conquering hero

Mike Sullivan shares Stanley Cup with Duxbury

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STANLEY CUP QUINTET: The Sullivan family – Kate, Kaitlin, Matthew, Mike and Kiley – proudly poses for a photo with the Stanley Cup. Mike Sullivan, head coach of the 2016 Stanley Cup champion Pittsburgh Penguins, chose to bring the prized trophy to places that had a significant impact on his life. Those destinations included Duxbury, the place where he raised his family and currently lives. More photos on pages A10 and B13. Photo by Deni Johnson

Holy Family Church was the center (ice) of attention.

The line to get in was so long that visitors spilled out the wooden doors into the neighboring parking lot.

This wasn't the scene for Sunday mass. No, it was more like 'Wednesday worship.'

Hockey fans young and old ventured to the parish last Wednesday to stand at the altar of Lord Stanley's Cup, marveling at the glistening, polished trophy. Leading the Stanley Cup sermon was Pittsburgh Penguins head coach Mike Sullivan, a longtime Duxbury resident.

Penguins coach Mike Sullivan enjoyed meeting with young fans.

As is tradition, each member of the 2016 Stanley Cup champion Penguins was given a few days with the prestigious trophy. Sullivan and his family chose to share the Cup with the people of Duxbury.

"I think it's our way of saying 'thank you' to a community that's been really supportive of me and my family," Sullivan said. "To us Duxbury is our home. This is where our roots are."

On December 12, 2015, Sullivan, who had been helming the American Hockey League's Wilkes-Barre/Scranton Penguins for the last six months, was named head coach of the Penguins following the firing of then-head coach Mike Johnston.

Then, almost a year to the day of being named head coach of Pittsburgh's minor league affiliate, Sullivan led the Penguins to a convincing victory over the San Jose Sharks to claim the Stanley Cup – becoming just the sixth head coach in NHL history to win the league's top prize after being hired midseason.

"When you have an opportunity like I did to win a Stanley Cup, you don't achieve that alone," Sullivan said. "It takes a lot of support and help along the way. My family, first and foremost, has offered that for me, and this Duxbury community has as well. We've made a lot of close friends here that have supported us along the way and this is our way of saying thanks."

Holy Family housed the Cup for a two-hour public viewing from 1-3 p.m. with Sullivan present for photos and autographs.

His father, George, with his black Penguins polo and white Stanley Cup champion hat, watched the line weave in and out from his seat in the corner. Sullivan's wife, Kate, helped take photos for smiling fans, and the three Sullivan children – Kaitlin, Kiley and Matthew – joined in the celebration as well.

Heather Westerman, along with children Tommy and Bryn, were the first fans in line to catch a glimpse of the Cup. Tommy and Bryn proudly wore their jerseys of Penguins stars' Sidney Crosby and Evgeni Malkin, respectively.

The Westerman's live in Pittsburgh during the school year but call Duxbury home in the summer.

"I came to see the Cup because it's so cool," said Tommy, who attended a skills and drills camp coached by Sullivan last summer.

"It's really fun and the kids are excited," added Heather. "We came here at 11 a.m. because we thought people would be here already. We watched every playoff game and the finals to support coach Sullivan."

Penguins fan Caitlin Boyle, flanked by mom, MaryLou and brother, James (wearing a Pittsburgh Pirates hat) made the journey from Rockland, MA, to battle the line inside the church.

Caitlin, a fan of Malkin from his early playing days in Russia, became a Penguins supporter once "Geno" first suited up for Pittsburgh in 2006. Since 2010 she's attended every game that Pittsburgh has played in Boston against the Bruins.

"I think it's cool that the Stanley Cup is here because [Sullivan] is showing that he didn't forget where he came from," Caitlin said.

Penguins' jerseys, as you might expect, were a popular clothing item among the crowd. But Bruins, Buffalo Sabres, Chicago Blackhawks, Montreal Canadiens and Minnesota Wild garb could be seen throughout the day.

Even a fan of the Tampa Bay Lightning – the same team that fell to the Penguins in a grueling seven-game series in the Eastern Conference Finals – came to meet Sullivan and get his hands on the Cup that barely eluded his favorite franchise.



Penguins coach Mike Sullivan enjoyed meeting with young fans. Photo by Aaron Carr

One young fan, wearing the jersey of Penguins star defenseman Kris Letang, earned a wardrobe complement from Sullivan.

A plethora of Duxbury Youth Hockey players also attended the event.

"To have an opportunity to share this experience with the young kids and the young hockey players and fans in this area is important to us," Sullivan said. "I'm overwhelmed by the turnout and the amount of kids that have come to see the Stanley Cup."

"But I think the Stanley Cup has that allure to it," he continued. "It's really a magical trophy. It's really cool to be up close and personal to it and to give the kids from our town an opportunity to see it was important to us. It's a great thrill to see their raw emotion when they go up and see it."

Duxbury was the final stop on what became the Stanley Cup's Sullivan Family Tour.

Pittsburgh's bench boss took the Cup to both of his alma mater's, Boston College High School and Boston University; his place of birth, Marshfield and finally Duxbury, his residence ever since the early stages of his marriage to Kate.

Sullivan, 48, a former collegiate ice hockey star with the Terriers and an 11-year NHL veteran, viewed his victorious return to Massachusetts, with a Stanley Cup in tow, as a come full circle moment.

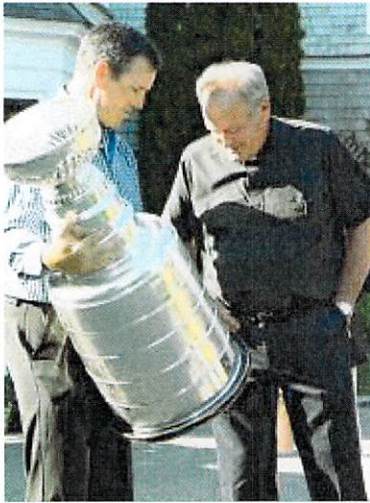
"When we sat down to create a game plan for our time with the Cup, my wife and I thought about places that had an impact on our life and helping us get to where we're at," Sullivan said. "BC High was a place that was important to me and that had a huge impression on my life. It was important for me to bring it back there to say thank you."

"At BU it was very similar," continued Sullivan. "BU helped shape my hockey life and what I learned there under coach [Jack] Parker, and the friendships and the teammates that I had there, certainly helped me along the way. I don't think I would've been an NHL player if I didn't go to BU and play for coach Parker."

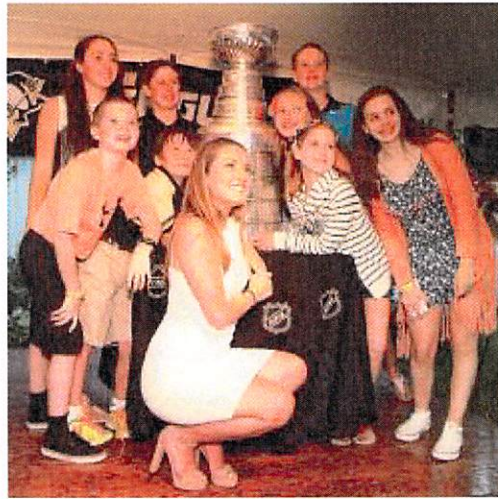
After all of the Duxbury fingerprints had been washed off the Cup, the trophy was transported to Letang for his turn with the prize. Pittsburgh's All-Star defenseman and his son poured milk and cereal into the silver bowl at the Stanley Cup's summit and enjoyed a true breakfast of champions.

Stanley Cup is feted by coach Mike Sullivan

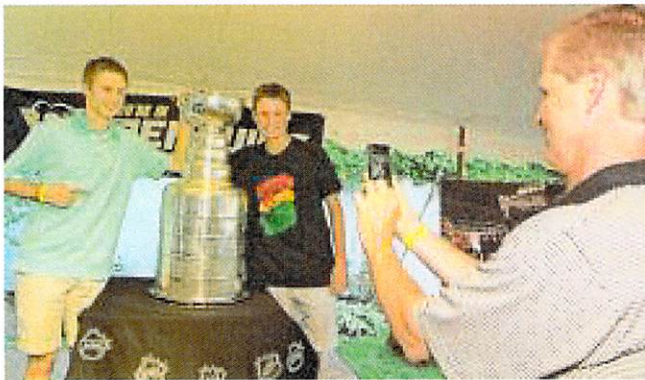
Coach Sullivan shows off the Cup to Father Chuck Hughes.



Coach Sullivan shows off the Cup to Father Chuck Hughes.



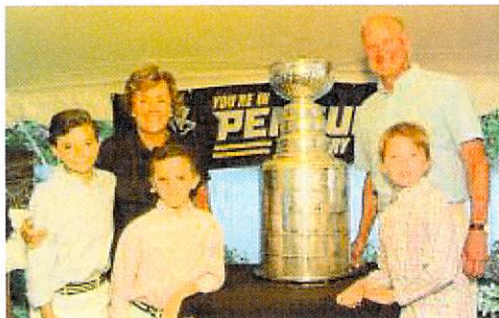
To say that visitors of the cup were thrilled to be around it is an understatement!



Rick Cox takes a picture of sons Brian and Erick with the Cup, a sight seen all week.



Colleen and Dave Maimaron, DHS football coach, enjoy a moment with the Cup.



Holly and Chuck Weilbrenner, owners of the Winsor House Inn, with their grandchildren Brandon and Zachary Marconi and friend Bennett Stout.

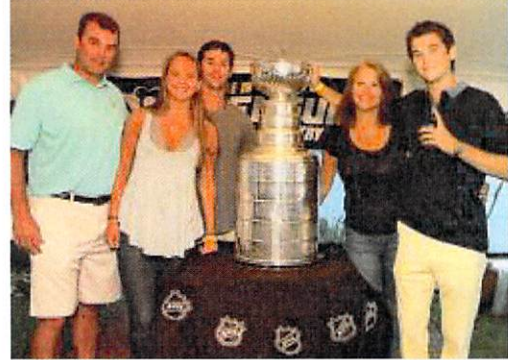


The Donato family, Paddi, Chris, Kathleen and Payton admire the Stanley Cup.

Photos by Deni Johnson



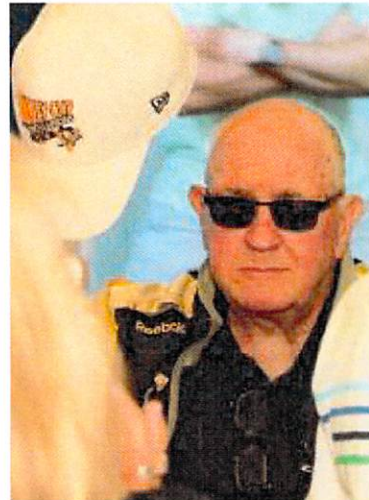
Kaitlin Sullivan (center) celebrates with friends Siobhan McCarthy and Keri Gould.



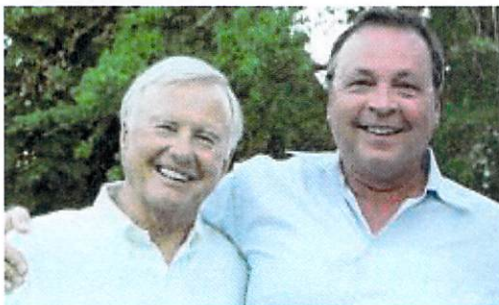
Dave Williams (far left), former pro hockey player, with his family, KC, Christopher, wife Pam and Tanner touch the Cup. Dave and Mike were teammates on the San Jose Sharks team early in their careers and have remained close friends over the years which lead both to settle in Duxbury.



Shaun O'Sullivan, owner of 21st Amendment Brewery, came all the way from San Francisco to present Mike with a plaque signifying their role in the victory. "El Sully" beer became the good luck beverage for the Pittsburgh Penguins when they were in the playoffs against San Jose.



The best coach Mike ever had is his dad, George, who tips his hat to his son. Mike became the sixth coach in NHL history to win the Stanley Cup after being hired midseason.



True lovers of the game of hockey, Dick Johnson and Bobby Farrelly arrive at the event.